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Complex educational model project in the Nivegy valley

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Introduction

The Faculty of Landscape Architecture of the Szent István University (formerly of the Corvinus University of Budapest) places great importance on providing its graduates with designing experience. In order to achieve this, the faculty organize more and more opportunities for professional practice every year. Each of these is usually related to different university subjects.

In the spring 2015, within the framework of the Rural Development subject, we began our involvement with the settlements in and near the Nivegy Valley. This was possible thanks to the good professional relationship between the LAG (Local Action Group) of the Balaton Uplands and our department, and the cooperation of the local governments of the area. Our first discussions with the locals revealed issues that couldn't be remedied within the confines of a single subject. This resulted in the idea that coursework related to other subjects should also be focused on this micro-region. This way it seemed possible to create a document addressing the multitude of problems in the area during the semester and the two-week long studio. At this point we could not see what difficulties this decision might cause, but we expected the project to end with positive results for both the students and the people from the sample area.

Background

The Nivegy Valley is a part of one of the most important tourist destinations of Hungary, the Balaton region. In order to protect this beautiful area's fragile ecosystem, a strict law (Balaton tv. 2000) regulates land use here. The entire valley is protected landscape area and part of the Balaton Uplands National Park. Within the valley, tourism is not common, the locals mostly work in agriculture. The nature conservation regulations often hinder the realization of improvements to the settlements and the local economy. The micro-region's typical varied landscape structure, fragmentation, viticulture, the historical monuments, the Mediterranean climate and general feeling, the proximity of the Lake Balaton, and the number of tourists by the lakeside settlements all suggest that the region's demographical and economic decay (KSH, 2011) could be stopped by embracing tourism. The locals, however, wish tourism only to have a smaller, complementary role to agriculture, horticulture (in

addition to the traditional grape cultivation, orchards have emerged and wine production has advanced) and livestock farming (cheese production), thus retaining the fundamentally cultivation-focused character of the land. This is different from the aims of the communities directly by the lake, as local developments there primarily aim to promote tourism.

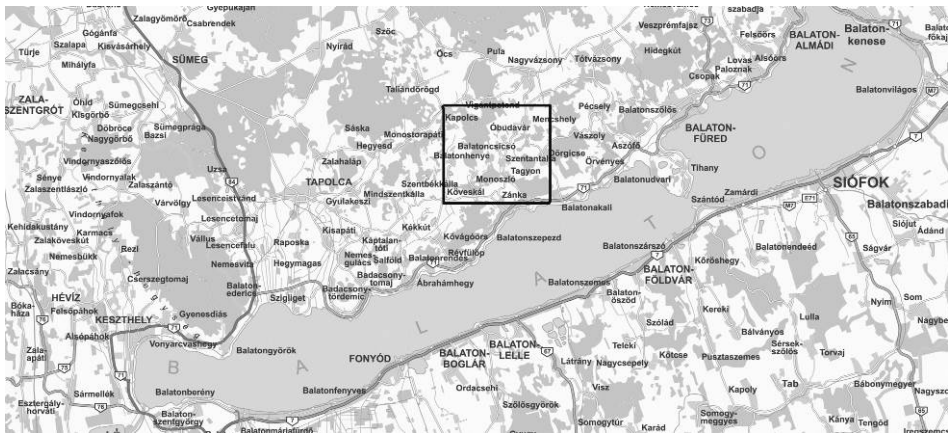


Figure 1. Nivegy valley
(http://terkep.network.hu/kepek/turista_terkepek/balaton_turistaterkepe?newwindow=true)

Learning about the history of the landscape helped us explore possibilities for sustainable land use and shaped our developmental recommendations. In our research we leaned primarily on the works of Veress (2014), and Sági and Zákonyi (1974), but we also used historical maps based on land surveys conducted by the military (tajertektar.hu). Furthermore, our database was also expanded using freely available data and maps on agriculture and nature conservation. The contents were created within the framework defined by the Hungarian regional development policy (OFTK, 2014) and rural development (ÚMVP, 2007, NVS, 2012), and the local rural development strategy (HVS, 2013).

We decided to organize the work into a project, which is a method with a long-standing tradition in education (Verók and Vincze, 2011). Projects, as a unit of study first appeared in the 18th century on the Architectural University of Paris. The term was also used in the polytechnics education in 1842-43 (Altmannsberger, 2014). In the 19th century, the method appeared on several colleges of architecture and engineering in the United States, then spread to further, more diverse areas of study (Knoll, 1997). The current definition of the term 'project' in pedagogy has its roots in the American reform pedagogy,

which emerged around 1900. William B. Rogers, Calvin M. Woodward, and Charles R. Richards, significant figures in this development, used the word project as a synonym of 'practical problem solving' (Knoll, 1997, Hortobágyi, 2002).

Project method is a particular studying technique or unit. It is a way of acquiring information results a product (document, poster etc.), during which students aim to discover as many connections and links as possible to each individual problem. Thanks to this, during the designing process the students can connect the pieces of knowledge obtained in each 'isolated' subject.

Goals and objectives

Though the goal of the Faculty and the Department is to provide an education focused on practical applications, there are few opportunities in day-to-day to connect multiple subjects and/or students with different specializations to solve a real-world problem during a semester.

The result of the Nivegy project is a complex development concept based primarily on the landscape values and the land use traditions. It also manages to satisfy present-day societal, ecological, and economic needs, and is in accordance with the principles of sustainability, promoting the economic security of the region, balance in its development, and the preservation of its beautiful scenery. The goal of the model project was to create an educational structure based on the multidisciplinary approach. In this paper, we present its successes, difficulties, and the lessons learned during the process.

Method

The following six subjects were involved in the project:

In the subject 'Land Use Planning and Regional Development', the students explored the settlements' societal and economic indices, the last few years' efforts and their results, and plans for the future. They had to use databases they were already familiar with in theory, and would use in their further careers (ex. TEIR, TIR, KSH, tájértéktár). They analysed the urban land use plans and created a regulatory proposal for the landscape protection zone (Filepné et al., 2014).

In 'Rural Development', students explored land uses dating back multiple centuries, agricultural tradition, and potential land uses made possible by the local conditions. They wrote a proposal for the improvement of the local economy utilising the possibilities in landscape development. For parts of the

area, they created exact landscape plans and made recommendations regarding the regulation of the significant waterways. The cadastre of landscape values was drawn up.

The subject 'Green Infrastructure' was concerned with exploring the green infrastructural elements of the settlements. The students familiarized themselves with the elements of the area's green network, analysed the network system, and proposed improvements for what they found lacking.

As tourism was especially important for the client, detailed research was made about both the tourism infrastructure and superstructure in the course 'Tourism'. The students developed proposals for both tourism development and tourism marketing opportunities in the settlements and the Nivegy Valley.

Protecting the heritage is of great importance in this particular area, as it belongs to a national park, is part of the Balaton recreational area, and has a lot of monument of cultural significance. Within the framework of the 'Heritage Protection' subject, the landscape values were surveyed, and the information regarding their maintenance was collected. These were incorporated into the plans, ensuring the preservation of the values.

Lastly, in the subject 'Digital Planning Techniques', the students created the basic map of the area, analytical plans from different perspectives, and the propositional plans. In general, this subject was responsible for providing appropriate map database and methodology required for the visual representations of the theoretical and written material.

The professors of the six subjects surveyed the area before the start of the project, and met the significant local stakeholders (mayors, civil leaders, influential farmers). There were 20 students (with specializations landscape and regional planning "C", landscape protection "B", urban planning "F", and open space architecture "A") involved in the exercise, out of whom 10 students (of B and C specializations) attended the design practice.

The students were divided into pairs, each taking a settlement. The students of B and C specializations worked on settlements in the Nivegy Valley, while those of A and F specializations worked on surrounding ones. During the semester, each pair did work related to their designated settlement in the frame of the six different subjects. Each student of B and C specializations was given a topic during the studio that they had to develop for the entire region based on previous papers and field surveys.

We had one field survey as a group during the semester, then spent the first week of the studio in Nivegy Valley. On the second week the plans and thematic documents were created at the university. Both the professors and the students had many conversations with locals over the course of the field work, which deepened the picture shown by the research and map analyses. A SWOT analysis was done of the entire valley during the two-week studio, based on which first an 'objective tree' was created, followed by detailed recommendations. At the end of the studio, the results were presented by the students to the locals in Balatoncsicsó, thus concluding the project.

Results

By the end of the practice, the Nivegy Valley Landscape and Tourism Development Study with multiple segments was completed. The history of the landscape and changes in land use dating back centuries provide a point of reference: they show the permanent characteristics of the landscape and the parts of history deeply ingrained in the local consciousness. These hints at what potential developments may prove successful, as the viable paths are the ones that were proven functional and sustainable in history (Fig. 2.).

Tourism, as a significant part of local economy, is already present in five settlements. The conditions are ideally suited for it, as proven by the assessment and the cadastre of landscape values found in the appendix. The chapter regarding hiking routes and possible improvements to them is also valuable.

One of the significant landscape elements and factors of the valley is the creek. Though it can destroy, it also means life, and holds ecological and aesthetic value. One of the chapters deals solely with it. Further planning is required for the realization of the programmes and activities detailed in the paper, for which guidelines are given at each programme.

The local governments and the LAG were appreciative of the study, and admittedly did not expect such a comprehensive work. They utilize the information found in it in day-to-day life. The work organization of the LAG is in the midst of creating the new local strategy, in which process they also take advantage of the study.

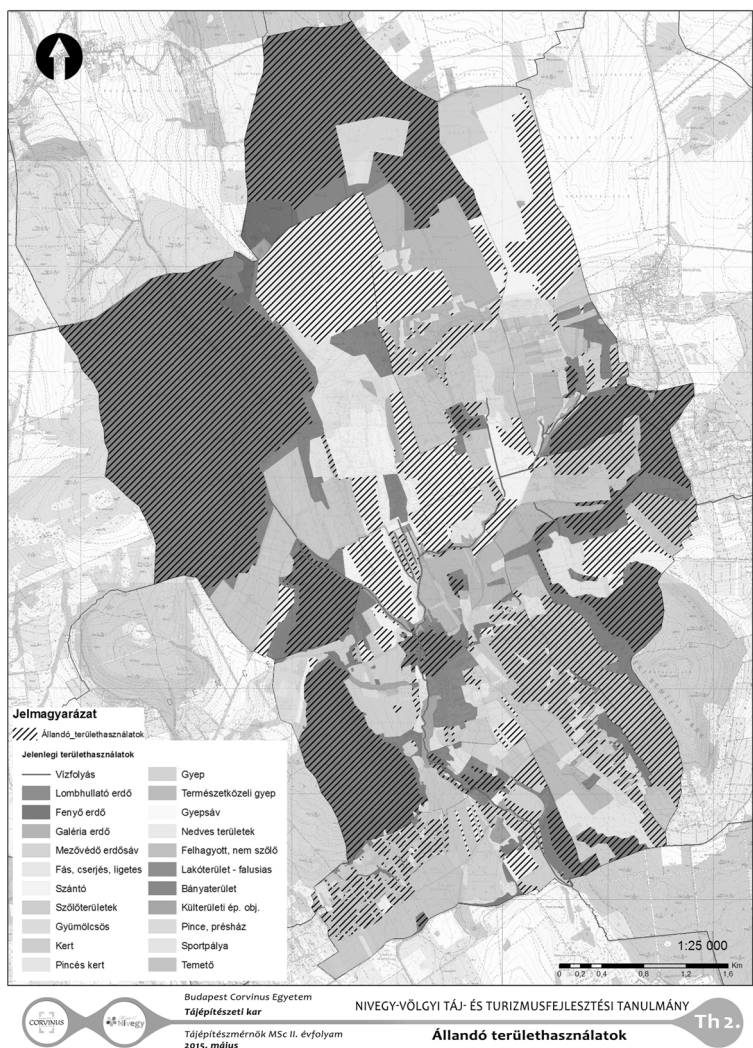


Figure 2. Standard landuses (Source: Tanulmány, 2015)

Though in a sheltered environment and with the constant assistance of several professors, the students were able to work on a real project, during which they had to face the difficulties of teamwork, discussions with the 'clients', and the use of previously learned methods (creating maps, SWOT, 'objective tree', planning process). At the same time, they took part in the creation of a study with actual real-life use. They experienced that their words have consequences. The other significant benefit of this project was that they learned to think not on a settlement, but a regional level – they realized that this kind of thought differs both in terms of quantity and quality.

It was also interesting for the professors to gain insight into the contents and structure of other subjects and the methods utilized by other teachers. Working together strengthened the internal cohesion of the department, and also our outside connections.

Discussion and Conclusion

There were, of course, some difficulties. Problems included:

- separating the subjects when grading the assignments
- organization of the survey: deciding on the parts of the landscape to visit during the survey, as a day is a short amount of time
- making the maps cohesive (unified use symbols, color scheme)
- handling the different specializations (subject structures, interests of students)
- putting together the final document and organizing the presentation and
- interdepartmental communication.

The method of teaching can ultimately be deemed successful, as we completed the set goals and the process provided the students with a unique experience. There are, however, a few things we would do differently today. Most importantly:

1. Organization of the semester/subjects and the studio has to begin very early.
2. Students have to be given very detailed directions for their tasks.
3. Two land surveys have to be organized during the semester.
4. While the presentation has to be given on the last day of the practice, the documentation can be sent later.
5. The teachers have to consult in detail about the material included in their subjects and the assigned tasks.

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